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CIA revelations lead to charges of ineptitude

By Adam Pertman
Globe Staff

WASHINGTON - Congressional leaders said yesterday that they were alarmed and disappointed by the information given them by the CIA director about secret administration dealings with Iran which, according to one legislator, included a \$12 million purchase of US weapons.

"This whole operation, its genesis and the carrying out of it, was incredibly clumsy and amateurish," said the incoming Senate majority leader, Robert Byrd (D-W. Va.), after a closed-door briefing for the Intelligence Committee by the director of central intelligence, William Casey.

"I think it was ill-conceived and ineptly implemented," added Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), who will be the next chairman of the Armed Services Committee and who also attended yesterday's hearing.

While members of the House and Senate intelligence panels said they were grateful that the White House was finally filling them in on the secret operation, they argued that the administration had broken the law by not informing them sooner. They also said that the White House had put national security at risk.

At the same time, the lawmakers continued their criticism of President Reagan's foreign policy-making apparatus. They insisted that it had to be overhauled to prevent a repeat of the enterprise that involved shipping weapons to Iran while asking for its help in getting American hostages released from Lebanon.

Sen. Dave Durenberger (R-Minn.), chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, was among those who said the administration's briefings had made it clear the Iran operation was so scatter-shot that it was difficult to piece together.

He and the committee's vice chairman, Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-

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Vt), sent a letter to Reagan yesterday expressing their concerns.

Casey testified yesterday before both the House and Senate intelligence committees. Earlier in the day, key members from both chambers met at the White House with John M. Poindexter, the president's national security adviser and the man who orchestrated the Iran initiative.

"There were enough people involved over a fairly substantial period of time in this particular operation, so there is no place where all of the facts are known," Durenberger said later. "I think that ought to be of concern to some people."

Moynihan incredulous

Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) implied that Casey had been less than forthcoming, without elaborating. "I can't believe what I heard, and I don't," he told reporters. "You're all getting bits and pieces of the story and so did we."

Leahy, meanwhile, stressed his belief that the administration was misdirecting the turmoil over who was to blame for the negative reaction to the Iran operations.

"The White House has got to understand this isn't a public relations disaster, it's a national security disaster; this is a policy disaster; this is a disaster in the fight against terrorism," Leahy said.

Because intelligence committee information is classified, few details were disclosed of what was said at yesterday's hearings. But Rep. Jim Wright (D-Texas), who will become speaker of the House in January, did provide some new insights after leaving a morning committee hearing with Casey.

Missiles from Texas

Wright said that 1,000 of the 2,008 TOW antitank missiles that Iran bought from the United States were assembled last February in San Antonio. The total number of missiles cited by Wright was double what the president had said were sent.

For the first time, Wright also put a price tag on these sophisticated armaments, saying they had cost Iran "\$12 million-plus." He added that he had been told that "they deposited money in a

Swiss bank" but did not say who had given him that information.

Wright said Casey had assured members of the House Intelligence Committee that there were no other instances in which the CIA had been told to withhold information about a covert operation. Reagan ordered Casey early this year not to tell key legislators about the Iran operation.

In 1984, after the CIA mined a harbor in Nicaragua, Casey signed a pledge that he would notify congressional leaders when a presidentially ordered covert action took place. Casey confirmed reports that Attorney General Edwin Meese 3d had reviewed Reagan's directive that Casey not keep this promise, Wright said.

'A higher level'

"The problem lies at a higher level than that," Wright said when asked if Casey had been pressed on the issue. "The problem lies with the determination of someone in the executive branch that the president doesn't have to abide by the law unless he wants to."

Several laws call for notification of Congress in case of covert operations, and legislators from both parties continued to assert yesterday that those laws had been violated. Byrd and others vowed to tighten the wording of the statutes.

The 1977 Arms Export Control Act requires notification of Congress of sales or transfers of major items of military equipment worth

more than \$14 million, and the Diplomatic Security and Anti-Terrorist Act of 1986 forbids the transfer of more than \$1 million in munitions or military technology to states that back terrorism.

In addition, a 1982 amendment to the 1947 National Security Act requires notification of covert operations in "timely fashion."

Response on legality

Casey was asked while leaving the Senate Intelligence Committee briefing whether any laws had been broken. He said, "Oh, no, no, no."

Durenberger said his impression, after listening to Casey, was that the administration would not have revealed the Iran enterprise at all had information about it not leaked out.

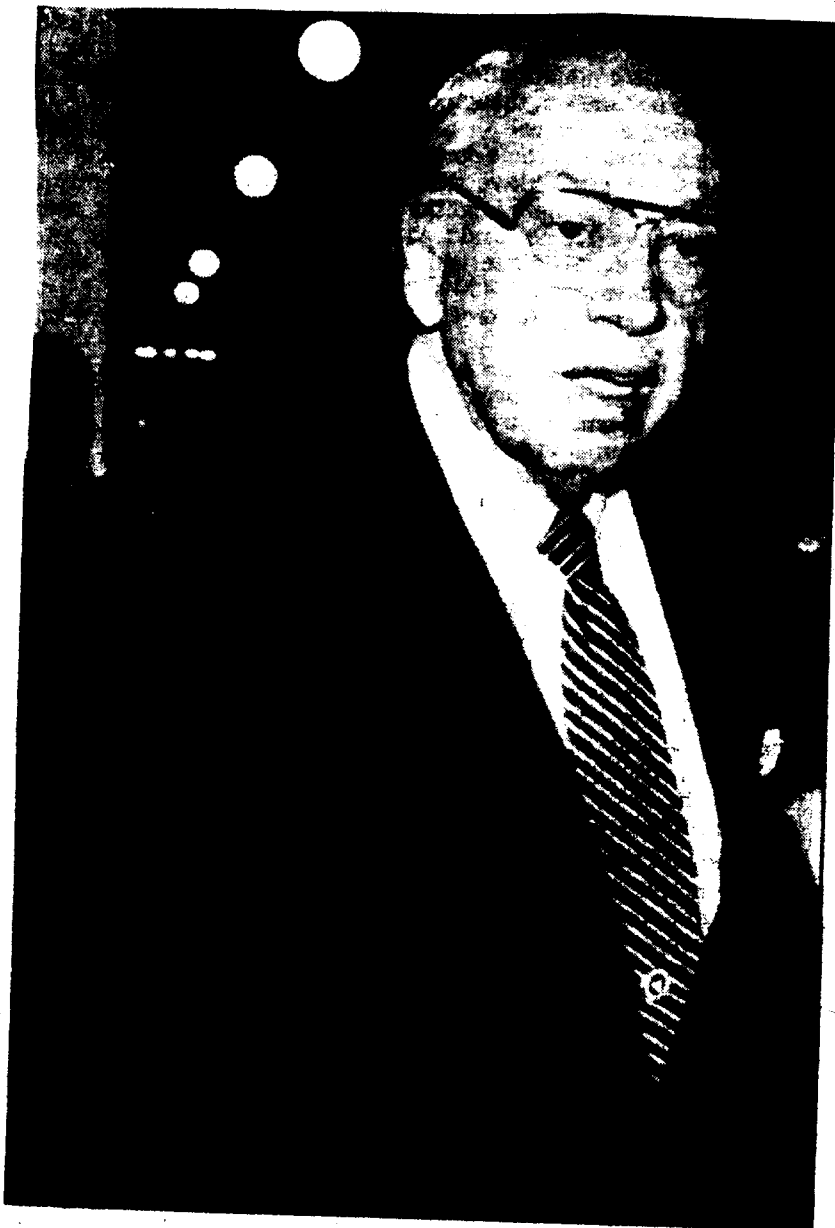
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"Whether they broke the law or not, they intended not to inform the American people, they intended not to inform the Congress about something they knew would become public knowledge if it was exposed to risks," he said.

"They were willing to trust the lives of hostages to fanatics and at least radicals in Iran and they weren't willing to trust the American people and the Congress of the United States," Durenberger said.

Wright also said Casey had confirmed that third countries had been involved in the US effort to send weapons to Iran, though he would not say which ones. Israel is known to have participated, and France and Portugal reportedly did too.

"It seems clear that those other countries, Israel included, felt they were doing the wishes of the United States," Wright said. "I know there were several countries."



William Casey, CIA director, leaves Capitol yesterday after he briefed House intelligence committee on US-Iran arms deal.

AP photo